



Reading Journal Guidelines and Suggestions

Here are some guidelines from the George Mason University Writing Center:

- ✓ *Begin each new essay, story, or poem without predetermined bias. If you decide in advance that you won't understand or like a literary work, you close out the possibility of new experiences and new knowledge. You do not have to, nor should you, enjoy every work of literature that you read, but you should be willing to recognize that the imagination (and your potential for intellectual growth!) is limitless.*
- ✓ *Read slowly. This suggestion can't be stressed enough. If you rollerskate through an art museum you won't see the paintings. Pause after each paragraph or passage and see if you can summarize it in your own words— if you can't, try reading it again!*
- ✓ *Read with pen in hand. Underline or highlight key phrases, speeches by major figures, or important statements by the narrator. Look up words that you don't know. If a sentence doesn't seem to make sense, try rearranging the phrases in it (writers in the 18th & 19th centuries often used a syntax that is different than what we are used to in modern time).*
- ✓ *Look for those qualities that professional writers look for in real life: conflict, contrast, contradiction, and characterization. Try to find (and follow) the main thread of the text.*
- ✓ *Ask silent questions of the material as you read. Don't read passively, waiting to be told the "meaning." Instead, ask the questions devised by reporters: Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How?*
<<http://www.gmu.edu/departments/writingcenter/handouts/puller.html>>

"So what should I write?"

For each literary work that we read, please include in your journal entry...

1. the **title** of the work and **date** of publication
2. the name of the **author** and any biographical information that you know
3. any **relevant historical events** influencing the work— *I encourage you to do a little background research!*
4. list the main **characters**, describe the **setting**, and give a brief **summary** of the plot
5. examine the **interaction between the characters** and consider the character's **motivation** and/or **internal/external conflict**
6. record your **first impressions**, take note of **phrases or ideas** that seem to be repeated for emphasis, record **images** that are particularly moving and/or effective, write down **quotations** that seem significant, offer **your opinion** on the author's style
7. try to identify the **THEME**— This is most important. What was the author's purpose in writing this work? Exactly what **idea/feeling/message** is the author trying to get you, the reader, to understand? If you were to personally ask the author, "**What EXACTLY did you want me to get out of reading this,**" what would his/her reply be?

*When you have questions or are unclear about any part (or all parts!) of the work you are reading, don't feel discouraged: your classmates are probably struggling, too. Don't get frustrated; instead, create some pointed discussion questions, write them in your journal, and post them on the Moodle Forum so that we can tackle them together. You'll be surprised where a good question can lead you!